19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER III

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Karen are of medium height. On the plains they average about five feet, four inches, in stature, and in the hills they are about three inches shorter. The women are smaller than the men.[1] The hill people have the harder struggle for a livelihood and are also more liable to attacks of malaria. The Brecs show evident signs of stunted growth. On the plains and in the more fertile lower hills we find that the Karen are a stocky race with broad, well-built bodies, strong legs, and well-rounded calves. The legs are often short in proportion to the body. Karen players on a football team are usually noticeable for their sturdy appearance, in contrast with the slimmer Burman boys. They are capable of considerable physical exertion, but soon tire. The women are well formed and buxom. They have an erect carriage, being used to bearing heavy burdens on their heads or backs. Their teeth, like the men's, are stained with continual betel chewing. In the hills their lack of bathing and their accumulations of beads and charms detract from their appearance; but when they have taken on more cleanly ways they become not unattractive. Their youth is cut short by heavy work in the field, constant childbearing, and nursing, and soon the signs of age appear.

The color of the Karen varies all the way from a light olive complexion to a dark coffee brown. On the whole, their color could be said to range between that of the Burmans and the Chinese. Those who work indoors are, of course, lighter than those who work in the open. Many skins have a distinctly yellowish or red-

[1] I took a few measurements with the tape line, and found that about seventy men on the plains gave the above average. The tallest was five feet, nine inches, and the shortest was four feet, eleven inches. In the hills my measurments were confined to one village. Here the headman was the tallest, measuring five feet, six inches. The shortest man in the village was four feet and eleven inches in height. Of about twenty women measured the tallest was five feet, five inches, and the shortest, four feet, nine inches. Three were each four feet, ten inches. The average among the women was a very small fraction over five feet. Dr. Mason gives the shortest man, a Bghai chief, as being only four feet, eight inches high, while the shortest woman he measured was four feet, five inches tall. *(Jour., Asiatic Soc. of Bengal*, Vol. XXXV, p. 7.) MacMahon notes that in the Red Karen country the women are usually as tall as, if not taller than, the men. *(The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 54.)

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

men is rare. I can recall only one man who had a hairy chest. There is nothing unusual about the eyebrows.

The Karen seem to be susceptible to all the diseases prevalent in the country. Children are seen more often than not with distended bowels, due to worms. Enlarged spleen is the rule in the hills, where malaria is so prevalent. A number of cases in which a low vitality has caused ulcers to break out and involve the entire system have come under my notice. Epidemics of measles are much feared, due to complications induced by bathing soon after the rash has disappeared, the bathing being thought necessary. Smallpox does not cause much apprehension. The bubonic plague has never claimed many Karen victims, but the influenza was terribly fatal during the cool season of 1918-19. Tuberculosis is one of the many diseases from the West that is claiming its victims among the Karen people. Though their open-air life safeguards them somewhat, their fear of demons causes them to cover their heads at night, and they breathe only through their blankets. Those who live in the better built houses on the plains also deprive themselves of fresh air by retiring into the close inner room of their homes in order to avoid the smell of cooking, which they fear. Such superstitious practices furnish ideal breeding-places for germs. The unbalanced diet of the Karen also restricts their disease-resisting powers. One hopes that, with improved ideas on sanitation and hygiene, the people of this race will not only be relieved from the present high rate of infant mortality, but also that those surviving may attain greater longevity.

The presence of certain birth-marks on the children of Mongolian parents has been thought by some scientists to be an important criterion for distinguishing members of that race.[1] The Karen infants certainly have these blue patches on the back and buttocks. Sometimes they are so indistinct as to be hardly noticeable, and again they are clear and bright. They are irregular in shape and size. My observations confirm the accuracy of the census returns, namely, that about seven out of ten children have these marks at birth. They usually disappear by the time a child is a year old. The Karen explanation for them is that they are the stains of leaves, on which the spirits of the children sat or laid down to rest in the course of their long and wearisome journey from their former abode. These marks are thought to show that the children having

[1] *The Indian Imperial Census*, 1911, Burma, Pt. I, 281-286.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 API Burma
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333. KARENS BRINGING ELEPHANTS TO MARKET.

"a spirit of equality, and governed by the moral influence of its natural heads alone." (Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I., p. 407.) The chief of these elders is called *Sawkè*; he gives his name to the village. The faults of the Karéns are their dirt, their addiction to drink, and a degree of superstition so extreme that a motherless infant is refused adoption for fear of turning the wrath of a vengeful demon upon the foster-mother. In epidemics of cholera and small-pox the Karéns abandon their villages in panic fear. The Karéns are shorter but of stouter build than the Burmans and Talaings, and of much fairer complexion. But their name of "white" Karén is derived from their clothing. Very characteristic is their short upper arm. Young people of splendid physique may be seen; but the conditions of life are so hard, and malaria is so prevalent in the forests, that the population remains stationary—by the census of 1891, 633,600. The toilsome Karén finds lightness of heart in the liquor he brews, a remarkable contrast to the vivacious and abstinent Burman. The contrast is borne out in the dreary wail of the Karén music and the bright and exuberant cadences of the Burmese. Karén children grow independent very young (No. 355), and begin their heavy outdoor labour soon. Early physical exertion possibly accounts for the second moral quality noted above. The hill-cultivation is greatly at the mercy of the seasons, from burning-time in April to harvest in October. The hardship is aggravated by a superstition of divination-bones (*Kyeyyo*) which often tabooes the most eligible sites. Scarcely have the crops been garnered than the clearing of a fresh site for the village begins.

334. KARENS GOING OUT TO WORK.